NOT TO BE ISSUED
OUT OF THE LIBRARY.

891.61
Ayt/Pol
78366

00078366

BOMBAY BRANCH

OF THE

Royal Asiatic Society.

Digitized with financial assistance from the
Government of Maharashtra
on 17 February, 2016

POLAND,

78366

HOMER,

AND OTHER POEMS.

By.
W. E. Aytoun.

DULCE ET DECORUM EST PRO PATRIA MORI!

LONDON:

LONGMAN, REES, ORME, BROWN, GREEN, & LONGMAN;

AND ADAM BLACK, EDINBURGH.

1832.

00078366

EDINBURGH:
PRINTED BY BALLANTYNE AND COMPANY,
PAUL'S WORK, CANONGATE.

TO

PRINCE ADAM CZARTORYSKI,

AND

THE POLISH EXILES,

THIS VOLUME

IS INSCRIBED,

WITH THAT DEEP RESPECT

WHICH THEIR SUFFERINGS IN THE CAUSE

OF FREEDOM AND THEIR COUNTRY

DEMAND,

BY

THE AUTHOR.

POLAND.

Spirit of Freedom, shadow of the God
Whom nations worship when he walks abroad;
Shadow, yet light, to which we turn our eyes,
When chafed by wrongs or smote by miseries;
Guardian of truth, without whose aid our life
Would be a warfare of eternal strife—
Where hast thou hid thy face and veil'd thy brow?
The hearts of men are searching for thee now.
Lo! from its watch a glorious star is driven,
There is a comet wand'ring through thy heaven;

There is a plague upon the shrinking earth,
That threats thy reign with pestilence and dearth—
A deep and dark conspiracy of sin
Has ring'd and hemm'd thy ancient castle in;
We seek, but know not whither thou hast fled—
Come, ere the living shrink into the dead—
Come, ere the tyrant and his brother slave
Have rear'd their ghastly trophies o'er the brave
Who fought and fell on Poland's bloodiest day,
The martyrs in the last Thermopylæ!
Let us not hear that cruel march again!
Come, like an earthquake traversing the plain,
That makes the hills resound, and cities shake;
O come, we pray thee, for thy childrens' sake,
Rise ere another field is lost and won,
Avenge us by a second Marathon!

O thou poor country! 'twas a crime for thee
Even to dream that freemen should be free;
It is a crime when weakness wars with might,
Or dares impeach its law that power is right;
It is a crime that ne'er can be forgiven,
To break a tyrant's chain and side with Heaven:
For this—for uttering loud thy just appeal—
A hard and bitter penance dost thou feel.
Ask not for justice here, for she hath gone
To plead thy cause before a higher throne;
To show thy wrongs in characters of flame,
Before that footstool whence her mission came.
Speak not to men, they tamely see thee weep,
For they are bribed, or heartless, or asleep,
Or very fear hath bow'd their heads so low,
That none dare look on such a giant foe!

Thou desolated widow! fold thy veil—
There is no ear to hearken to thy tale;
There is no refuge, no deserted shed,
To screen from blasts, and furious storms, thy head—
The wounded bird can flutter to its nest,
But thou hast no such dwelling-place of rest;
Thou hast no friend to bid thee to his hall,
Thou hast no kinsman to avenge thy fall,
The monarchs of the earth have past thee by,
Nor deign'd to look upon thy misery.
Go thou and weep upon thy childrens' grave,
They died for thee, the beautiful and brave!
Go thou and weep at early dawn of morn,
Go thou and weep when glooming clouds are shorn
Of their day radiance, and the evening star
Above the dark blue mountains glimmers far—

Go thou and weep—no planet of bright hope
Hath the ascendant in thy horoscope—
Hard fate hath fill'd for thee her greatest cup,
And forced thee to the dregs to quaff it up;
She hath no deadlier poison to bestow,
Go thou and weep, thou need'st not fear thy foe!

O Europe! Europe! falsely named the wise,
How could'st thou gaze on such a sacrifice?
Well didst thou know the base and guilty wile,
And yet thy lips were smiling all the while—
Tell me, I pray you, was the sight so sweet,
To view thy sister gasping at thy feet?
Was it so very pleasant to thy heart,
To see her blood upon thy garments start?

Is that a stain so slight that in a day,
Yea, in one age, it can be cleansed away?
Is freedom then a thing so very weak,
That thou wilt see it die, nor deign to speak?
Is thy voice gone, or doth it only err,
That it will flatter such a murderer?

Why hast thou slept in such a dreary trance,
Is freedom not thine own, thou glorious France?
Didst thou not draw for her the righteous sword,
Was not her name thy only rallying word?
Say, did she not within thy bosom burn,
Like unquench'd ashes in a burial urn—
Did she not riot there, until she leapt
Like light on darkness—were the bonds not swept

From off thy limbs—did not the tyrant's rod
Fall from his grasp when thou didst walk abroad?
Brandless and bright thou camest into the day,
All purged and cleansed from an iron sway—
Strong as an Amazon, yet just and pure
As those whose tales in lays of old endure.
Ah! when she call'd, why didst thou not arise,
Did none but thee deserve so rich a prize?
Did not thy blood throughout thy pulses stir?
Yes! thou hadst many a soul that worshipp'd her,
As all should worship—many a heart was thine,
That would have died to save so blest a shrine.
Why wert thou patient then? Alas! Alas!
Thou let'st the time, thou should'st have taken, pass;
Thou should'st have risen, ere the blow was sped—
To save the living, not avenge the dead.

It is no fame to rear a trophied grave
O'er her who pray'd for thee to help and save;
No honour, but to give an empty word,
To carve the epitaph, not draw the sword—
The voice of him to whom thy crown is given
Was fainter surely than the call of Heaven;
Why did ye wait for one so cold and weak?
There was no need to rest till he should speak.
O gallant-hearted, yet unthinking men,
Hope not to make that king a citizen!
Where is the virtue lies within a name?
Bourbon or Orleans, it is all the same—
What firm reliance could ye place in one
Who joins two parties, yet dare side with none?
Viceroy to him, whose crimes have sent him forth,
To seek a banish'd dwelling in the north—

Sovereign of those whose hearts he cannot win,
Sworn unto virtue, yet allied to sin—
The umpire of a poor and petty throne—
A felon, with the robes of justice on,
Who prates of virtue, and eternal laws,
Yet sneers at freedom and at freedom's cause:
A Sylla of the north—a laurell'd slave—
In words a patriot, and in deeds a knave!
Thou poor, thou broken, thou despised thing!
Thou voice, thou type, thou shadow of a king!
Think'st thou the hands that tore the forfeit crown
From off a tyrant's brow, will spare thine own?
Think'st thou that France will see her sister bleed,
Nor, though she could not ward, avenge the deed?
Thou tame apostate! wouldst thou dare to bar
The march of Freedom to her holy war?

Deem'st thou thy borrow'd sceptre e'er was made
To stop that bright, yet terrible crusade?
Away! away! thou canst not read the heart,
Thou hast no knowledge of her nobler part:
The spell within the bosom of the free,
Is a deep mystery—too deep for thee.
The hills, the dungeon, are to thee the same;
Back—back, and hide thy head for shame! for shame!

And thou, alas! where have thy terrors been,
Britain, my country, old and royal queen?
Thou, who hast drawn thy peerless sword so oft,
When the white flag of right was rear'd aloft;
Thou, unto whom the injured nations bow,
And bless the meteor justice of thy brow;

Thou haven, unto whom the merchant ships
Flee from the terrors of the dark eclipse;
Thou talisman, within whose charmed ring
Exists no evil—no accursed thing;
Thou tower of strength, which tempests ne'er can shake,
Thou slumbering giantess, awake! awake!
O! saw'st thou not the breach in Warsaw's wall?
O! heard'st thou not the warrior's battle call?
Leapt not thy lifeblood with indignant thrill,
Throbb'd not thy brain, and wilt thou yet be still?
Thy King is one whose very name alone
Hath rear'd within his subjects' hearts a throne.
Another Alfred, come to lead us back
Unto our ancient and deserted track;
To bring again those unforgotten days,
When virtue only won the meed of praise;

A lion-hearted prince, in whom we see
How bright beyond compare a crown may be,
When worn by him who never will disdain
His people's love to glorify his reign.
Nay, nay, thou wilt not sleep: this sacred spark
From Freedom's torch shall die not in the dark;
Be thou a refuge to the lost again,
Fling out thy battle like a cloud of rain,
Raise thy proud voice till quailing tyrants shrink,
And stand and tremble when they dare not think;
Be thou God's great and just avenger still,
And He will bless thee, as all nations will;
Be thou His scourge to drive this wolf away,
And break the fangs that marr'd that gallant prey.
Do this and prosper—Kings shall come to thee,
And do high homage on their bended knee;

The day will laugh upon thee with such smiles
As morning sheds upon the Cyclad isles;
Ne'er shalt thou feel the envious tread of time,
Unscared by treason, and unstain'd by crime;
Youth shall be thine, that hath no wintry age;
And thou shalt keep, within a woven cage,
Calm'd into boldness, Peace, that fearful dove;
Thou shalt have gift for gift, and love for love;
Mightiest among the mighty, thou shalt be
The star of nightly worship to the free,
And men of every clime, on every shore,
Shall praise thee, bless thee, and almost adore!

But thou, Sarmatia! is there here below
A thing so lost, so desolate as thou?

Is there another heart that ever knew
Such pangs as those that rive thy bosom through?
Yes! there is one, who even now doth ride
In all the splendour of despotic pride;
He, who hath bid his dark familiars come
To crown thee with the wreath of martyrdom;
To whom the eastern hordes their tribute bring,
And hail him tyrant, surely never king;
Whose very name is like a noxious charm,
Or evil omen, spoke to work thee harm;
Whose aim hath been, ay, even from his birth,
To rouse 'gainst Heaven, the blinded powers of earth;
Within whose parch'd and fear-distemper'd brain,
A nameless brand is stamp'd—the mark of Cain!
How can *he* dare, that royal wretch, to sleep
When victim nations raise their voice to weep?

The fearful curse that God hath written down,
The smoke from village, and from plunder'd town;
The anguish'd moan, the irons' heavy sound
Within the dungeon, far beneath the ground,
Where the young patriot, born amongst the hills,
Draws the damp breath, which poisons ere it kills;
Guilt, with its serpent eye, and frantic Fear,
Raving of murder where no hand is near;
These are the dreams that flit around his head,
These are the chamberlains that guard his bed.

Shall he escape a curse? O, do not speak—
For all that man could say were idly weak;
Within that heart of his more tortures live,
More galling stings, than words of fear could give;

Leave him alone, and let the silence roll,
That worst of terrors to a guilty soul;
For ever round him—let him hear the voice
Of EVIL whisper closely—"Come—rejoice!
Man, thou hast gain'd for us what we alone
Have striven to do, and yet have left undone.
Thanks for thy help—such thanks as we can give,
Live, till thou know'st how sweet it is to live;
Take thou no thought of what thou hast to dread,
Leave thou repentance for thy dying bed;
Then shalt thou feel how easy 'tis to bear
That which thou callest horror or despair;
Then wilt thou pray for life—but wherefore pray?
Thou canst not keep the night from following day.
The best and wisest of the human race
Have deem'd the grave a calm and quiet place;

Does not thy heart respond that it is so?"
Say, thou pale tyrant, darest thou answer—no?
Darest thou believe there is a God on high,
Yet hope to shun his pure and searching eye?
Thou worse than atheist! there are some so blind,
Who think that death has nothing left behind;
That all alike, the wicked and the just,
Fret their short hour, then mingle with the dust;
Dragg'd from their joy, and rescued from their pain,
To lie for ever there, nor wake again.
Take that unto thee for a saving faith,
Believe there is no judgment after death;
Strive, if thou wilt, to ruin and remove
All that is left us here of hope or love;
Press on to riot in the pride of guilt,
And laugh to see the blood of nations spilt;

For, if thou joinest men of holier creed,
Past all redemption thou art damn'd indeed!

Tnere was a time, ere tyranny begun,
When nations would not quail or bend to one,
Who thought a monarch too despised a thing,
And fain would make a despot of a king—
Insulted right and banish'd freedom then
Could find a friend in honourable men.
Brutus and Cato! yours are names that live
In that eternity which fame can give;
Glorious your deaths, nor have you died in vain,
Though now the chain you burst is link'd again;
If tyrants thus neglect the fate, which crime
Has brought their brethren in the olden time,

Let them but look a moment's space on him
Whose breath now makes the light of freedom dim,
Let them but see the certain prize of woe
Which guilt, to such as him, must still bestow,
Then, if they dare to gaze with steadfast eye,
On such a ghastly vision—let them die!

Lo! where he sleeps—can such as he repose—
How doth a tyrant dare his eyelids close?
To guileless hearts sleep is a blessed thing,
But to the guilty 'tis a piercing sting!
Is this like rest, this hot and hurried chase
Of fearful thoughts that anguish in his face?
Of palsied visions, and of dreams that swarm
Around the brain, with power to strike and harm?

O! what a soul is that, which flies for bliss,
Nay, for a refuge, to repose like this—
What are his waking thoughts, whose fancy teems
In sleep with torture—Would you know his dreams?

They led him back, by their mysterious spell,
To scenes his heart remember'd but too well;
They show'd him what his conscience strove to hide
Even from himself, and all the world beside;
They pierced for him the bosom of the grave,
They raised the phantoms of the good and brave,
They purged the dimness from his eyes away,
And bade him count his deeds, then dare to pray.

He stood as if upon a mountain side,
Above a low fair country; far and wide

"The fields were waving in the morning sun,
The happy time of harvest had begun;
The reaper plied him gaily at his toil,
And through the valleys rang a glad turmoil
Of merry voices; every heart was blest,
For labour was a pleasure after rest.
The earth, so kindred to the quiet skies,
Bloom'd like a little perfect paradise;
The lake lay waveless, and the rivers ran,
Leaping and singing, like a careless man,
Right through the bosom of the cloven woods,
And made a murmur in their solitudes,
That won the silence from the leafy shade—
Alas! that happiness like this must fade!

Far in the distance dim, there grew a mist
Like vapour by the morning glimpses kist;
At first a tiny thing; it rose and spread
Nearer, and nearer, till it gathered
Substance and form; athwart the sky it came:
Is it the smoke of some devouring flame?
The peasants gazed in silence. Then faint sounds
Came indistinctly from the forest bounds—
A bugle note—sometimes a startled cry,
As of a man in sudden jeopardy—
Then louder—fiercer—Ha! 'tis coming near—
At times the vivid glancing of a spear
Sprang in the wood. A loud and pealing drum
Beat to the charge. Fly! fly! your murderers come.
They burst upon the plain. A sable steed
Bore him who seem'd that furious band to lead.

The dreamer started. Fast the Cossack came,
His long lance beaming like a burning flame,
That must be quench'd—in what? In guiltless blood!
And quench'd it was; for, where the reapers stood
They met the charge; and when the charge was done,
On bleeding corpses look'd the blushing sun;
A brand was cast among the half-sheaved corn,
It caught, it kindled, and the bugle horn
Rang in the distance, till a shrilling yell
From the far village waken'd, like a spell,
The mountain echo; shriek on shriek arose,
Blent in strange contrast with the shouts of foes
In horrid triumph—faint they grew, then died,
For death is silent. This is kingly pride!
What price for this, thou sleeper, shalt thou pay?
It ended, and that vision pass'd away.

Another came. It was a gloomy cell,
Where, through cross'd bars, the feeble glimpses fell
Against the wall, where hung a broken chain,
Whose rusted links gave back no light again.
It seem'd as if for years no human face
Had come to shudder at so drear a place,
Where nothing, save the roof-drop's fretting sound,
Intruded on the lifelessness profound.
There, in a corner, where a rotting bed
Of straw was flung, a naked corpse was spread;
'Tis he, the ruthless wretch! whose envious feet
Trampled on virtue in her holiest seat;
Who brought the storm of war to cloud the sky,
Whose very brightness pain'd his jealousy.
A flaxen cord was twisted round his neck;
Upon his blue lips lay a crimson speck;

His eyes were starting underneath the brow,

Bent with the scowl of hatred even now;

His hands were clench'd, as in the frantic strife

They griped and struggled hard, for life—for life!

Convulsed his limbs. Ay, sleeper! strive to scream—

Is there not ghastly truth within a dream?

Know'st thou that face? Well may the tortured sweat

Stream on thy brow, thou dost remember it!

How can a brother e'er forget a brother?

You were the children of the self-same mother;

You both have sat upon one nurse's knee,

And clasp'd each other's necks with infant glee;

And now—nay! wherefore turn, and strive to hide

Thy countenance?—thou art a fratricide!

Blush not at that, it is thy noblest deed,

There was no fitter sacrifice to bleed;

A better service in a better cause,
Was never done to earth's insulted laws,
And homeless thousands will for once combine,
To thank, if not to praise, an act of thine—
O thou most stern avenger!—ancient times
Have known dark virtues nearly link'd to crimes;
A father then—a pure and virtuous one—
Hath raised the axe to slay a traitor son;
But *thou*—no other heart, save thine, can know
What made thee strike so merciful a blow;
It were no sin, if justice only sped
Her hallow'd vengeance at the felon's head;
Her deeds are pure, her mission is divine,
But sin has gain'd much empire over thine.
'Tis a strange law, or else we greatly err,
For murderer to slay a murderer:

Blood cannot wash away a bloody stain,
And deeper marks of slaughter must remain.
If to thyself thou seemest guiltless, then
None dare accuse thee to thy fellow men.
No price for this, thou sleeper, shalt thou pay.
It ended—and that vision pass'd away.

Another came—Within a deep ravine
A camp was pitch'd—proud dreamer, it is thine!
The soldiers of a thousand distant coasts
Swell'd up that army with their gather'd hosts:
The dull Siberian from his pine-tree shade,
The Cossack, Tartar, Russian, renegade,
Were there together. Thick as leaves they lay,
Swept from the forest in an autumn day,

Myriads, who cared not how they urged the blow,
And hardly knew their master from their foe;
Reckless of guilt, and strangers unto shame,
Their pastime murder, plunder all their aim.
O! hath high heaven its thunderbolts forgot—
Is there a hand can check them—is there *not?*

Earth was its own avenger. Secret death
Breathed out invisibly a poison breath;
Engender'd in her dark and silent womb,
It rose, like vapour from a noisome tomb,
Damp as a mildew, thin, and piercing cold
As the thaw breath upon a wintry wold:
It crept amidst the army. As of yore
The Pythian shafts flew fast along the shore,

And victim warriors strew'd the bloodless sod,
Smote by the vengeance of the angry God—
So flew the pestilence. For many a year
The soldier stood in battle's front of fear;
Saw the hot iron tempest showering fast,
Yet 'scaped the fury of its heedless blast;
Now, like a prize, his forfeit life is won,
The plague can do what war has left undone,
For it hath gain'd the mastery—the brave,
The craven, master, chieftain, serf, and slave,
All sink alike—the sharp and griding pain
Thrills through the body even to the brain;
Hot madness glares within the bloodshot eye,
They writhe and shriek, and curse, blaspheme, and die!
The living turn with loathing from the dead,
They dare not fling the dust upon their head.

They lie and rot, and moulder—they are given
Unto the charnel-worm, and winds of heaven:
Long may their children stand at even-tide,
By the low cottage on the mountain side,
And think they hear the distant bugle-horn
Of him they love, across the blue lake borne;
Long may they wait, till hope grows pale and sick,
And fearful thoughts come crowding fast and thick;
The winds may come and dirge them, and the rain
Wash with its tears their relics on the plain,
And the rank grass may spring, and close around—
It is their only monument and mound!—
What price for this, thou sleeper, shalt thou pay?
It ended, and that vision pass'd away.

Another came—Within the deepen'd blue,
Faintly look'd out a pensive star or two;

The moon was down, the wind, like one in pain,
Drove its long sigh across the snowy plain:
There are dark stains upon that purest page,
Stern marks of man's accursed sacrilege;
Footsteps deep dented, and a trampled targe,
Where broke the thunder of the squadron-charge.
It is a battle-field: The watchfire's light
Gleams from a distant camp into the night—
What mighty power is centred in a breath!
There moveth life, here lieth silent death.
That day, upon a field of no renown,
Freedom and Murder sat together down;
The stakes were armies, warring all around,
And struggling sternly for the vantage ground;
Freedom was faint, and on her forehead pale
The mantling fears wrote down a crimson tale;

But Murder's eye was fix'd, her hand threw fast,
Like one whose life was set upon a cast:
And when the latest, deepest die was flung,
She clapp'd her hands with joy, and then upsprung,
And shriek'd,—"'Tis mine!—'tis mine! this field
shall be
Named of my name—the tomb of Liberty!"

The wolf hath stolen from his mountain cave,
And glideth down like one who robs a grave;
His eye is red, his throat is parch'd and dumb,
Scarce can you hear his footsteps as they come;
He springs, with savage haste and grim delight,
Upon the first dead corse that meets his sight,
And tears, and feeds, and scowls with jealous eye
Upon the pamper'd vulture flitting by——

Czar! there are vaults wherein thy fathers sleep,
Round which the marble statues bend and weep;
O, fitting truth! no tears but those are shed
Above the cold and marble-hearted dead.
Yet it were nobler far, if they had died
In such a cause, with none to mourn beside;
Yea, had they found, like these, a living tomb
Within that lean and loathsome creature's womb,
It had been better far. Then Fame had sung
Their righteous deeds with her immortal tongue;
Then had their names been register'd indeed
Within the Book which none but freemen read.
What is their memory? What will be thine own?
The idle record of a lying stone!—
A worthless parasite's regret; or worse,
A purchased prayer!—Will it efface a curse?

There, with thy kindred, shalt thou lie and rot;—
Hope thou thy name at least may be forgot!

Seest thou that dying soldier on the ground,
Whose life is ebbing from a ghastly wound?
He hath no bed except the frozen snow,
No friend to wipe the death-damp from his brow:
His eye is struggling through the mist afar
To catch the glimmer of that feeble star;
Why doth he seek its light so faint and dim?
It is no star of hope, alas, to him!
Ay—but it shineth on his quiet home,
That nest of peace, where war hath never come;
Within his fancy, even now he sees
The old thatch'd roof beneath the linden trees,

The cradle, where his youngest infant sleeps,
Rock'd by his widow'd wife, who bends and
weeps;
He sees his children that around her kneel,
And try to calm the grief they cannot feel.
Say, doth *he* weep? No tear is in his eye:
Tyrant! It is no ghastly thing to die!
He fears it not, he hath no damning sin
To lime the soul, or cage it fluttering in.
His part is done—it was a glorious part!
He shielded freedom even with his heart,
Till it was pierced, and now into the air
He breathes for her a blessing and a prayer,
Shuts with a holy smile his heavy eyes,
Commends his country to his God, and dies!

Dreamer! if death had enter'd in thy tower,
To count the moments of thy latest hour—
If the hot fever madness stretch'd thee there,
With nothing left but penitence or prayer—
Wouldst thou, like him, compose thy limbs to rest,
Unscared by phantom forms, and thoughts unblest?
Wouldst thou, like him, peruse the tablets o'er
That lie deep graven in the bosom's core,
Nor find one black, or one unholy deed
Within the page of conscience register'd?
Say, wouldst thou calmly lay thee down to sleep,
Bless those who sigh, and comfort those who weep,
Then turn away unto the blessed shore,
Where sorrow clouds and sin distracts no more?
Ah! wherefore ask of thee a thing so vain—
That very thought hath rankled in thy brain;

'Tis shunn'd by thee, as one in crowded throng
Shuns him whom he hath wrought some deadly wrong,
And keeps his face averted when they meet.
Crime, to such hearts as thine, is surely sweet,
Or stern repentance is a thing of fear,
Fled from, and shuffled off from year to year;
That thought to thee, is like the naked sword
Hung o'er the head of the Sicilian lord,
Seen at the feast, and glittering through the veil,
Until the cheek of mirth grew blanch'd and pale.
Hast thou no wish, no hope to rise and flee?
Stay, then, and perish!—few will weep for thee.

Awake, thou sleeper! from thy mental sight
The dreams have pass'd unto the waning night;

Yet, ere thou goest forth, remember this,
Though old the doctrine, true the moral is,
The weak are judged less hardly than the strong,
A king who sins, commits a triple wrong:
True are the words, and more than man-inspired,
"Much hath been given, and much shall be required."
Didst thou receive thy power from Freedom's God
To change thy sceptre for an iron rod;
To tear the gem of mercy from thy crown,
To hew, without remorse, the green tree down;
To make the gyving chain, and dungeon breath,
The punishment for those who fear'd not death;
To loose thy savage and relentless band,
Like swarming locusts on a peaceful land;
To pluck down Freedom from her blessed throne,
And for her standard there exalt thine own?

O, wilt thou hear him vaunt, thou righteous Heaven!
That for such ends as these his power was given?
Wilt thou not strike amidst his sinful mirth,
This royal miscreant even to the earth?
Hast thou no chosen champion of the free,
Is there no Attila to strike for thee?
Or wilt thou still thy wrath and vengeance hide,
When we have none to range on virtue's side,
When we have grown so frantic, as to quell
The torch our fathers lit and loved so well?
It may be so—but these, what have they done?
It was their light, more honour'd than the sun;
Their beacon-fire upon the distant cape,
When rose the ocean in its hideous shape;
Their pledge of safety; they have kept it well,
Alas! why was it not unquenchable?

Thou know'st it was a virtue not to sin,
To burst the chain, when tyrants hemm'd them in;
Thou know'st how ill the truly noble heart
Can stoop to act a slave's dishonest part;
How life itself is weary, dull, and vain,
When not a limb can move without a chain.
When tyrants and their minions dare to thrust
A cruel arm against the brave and just,
The naked hand will rise against the steel;
A trampled worm will turn upon the heel.
Earth is abased, but 'tis not brought so low
That it must bend to every vaunting foe.
Are we so mean, that rude and ruffian might
Can make the evil cause appear the right?
Is Justice then so terrified or rare,
That she must lose her homage in despair?

No, no, it is not so! Though long delay'd
That cause, the cause of nations shall be made;
The good, the true, the terrible, and strong
Have slept awhile—they will not slumber long;
Now, even now, men's hearts are wide awake,
Too long has truth been lost for treason's sake.
Already hath the sky obscured its face,
The clouds are gathering in their muster-place;
The storm is climbing up its angry path,
Big with the vengeful thunders of its wrath;
None but the innocent may hope to stay.
Whither, ye tyrants, will you flee away?

O! that a new Tyrtæus would awake,
To speak aloud as never man yet spake;

To scatter forth his passion like a shower,
With voice of glory, and with words of power;
To rouse the passive nations, till they feel
The startling justice of that high appeal;
Until the spirit, caged within the soul,
Were free, and bounding onwards to the goal!
Until they knew it were a crime to rest,
When one brave heart was prison'd or opprest!
Until, with one accord, they started up,
Strong, as a giant rising from his cup!
Bright, as an eagle at the dawn of day,
Who shakes the slumbers from his eyes away,
Plumes his long wings, and meditates his flight
Above the clouds that curtain down the light!
Then would we purge the world of all the crime
That stains and blurs the latest page of time—

Then would we strike, ay, even in his den,
This coward robber of defenceless men—
Then would we burst the gate, and snap the chain,
Bring forth the captive into light again,
Drive the dark savage to his native wild,
And leave at least half Europe undefiled!

Our days of sloth are number'd to the fill—
Our fathers would have risen when we were still.
Yet fear not, Poland, from the slumbering heart,
Our better spirit cannot all depart;
A voice is pealing loudly in an ear,
That does not sleep, though it is slow to hear;
Thou art not friendless, though thou art alone,
Thy lips are mute, but memory hath not gone.

It were a shameful and a deathless stain,
To let a cry like thine be heard in vain.
Our annals shall not bear upon their face,
The damning marks of such a foul disgrace;
They shall not tell we heard a suppliant's call,
And idly stood beside to see her fall;
They shall not tell that Britain's voice was given
To hail a deed that bore the curse of heaven!
Once, once, indeed, we raised a cruel hand
Against the freemen of a daughter land,
And met, as all who dare the like should meet,
Our just reward in vengeance and defeat:
But not again shall such a deed appear,
To wring from Freedom's eye one bitter tear—
He, who hath spent long years of sad unrest,
A prison's inmate, or a dungeon's guest,

Where he could only count the lagging hour
By one faint sunbeam sliding on the floor;
Where he could only guess the joyous spring,
By the mild breeze and gay birds twittering;
He would not doom to such a lingering fate,
The very object of his deadliest hate;
How can we tamely see the vanquished brave,
Born from the reeking scaffold to the grave,
And not remember how our fathers died,
To keep our glorious birthright sanctified?
The field where Hampden's blameless blood was shed—
The block where gallant Sidney bow'd his head—
Are these forgotten? Has their memory gone
Like common trifles idly gazed upon?
Have we forgot how Scotland's patriots rose
To fight the war of God with banded foes?

Far up the hills, amidst some lonely glen,
They met, the brave and persecuted men!
A holy remnant of the just and true,
Sworn to that faith which tyrants never knew:
Hunted from house and home, they gather'd there
To offer up to Heaven their spotless prayer;
They knelt around, while one, with lifted hand
Invoked a blessing on that martyr band,
From Him, who never yet hath heard in vain,
The righteous murmur, or the good complain:
Then rose they up, and sang with one accord,
Their sweet and simple anthem to the Lord;
Till the far shepherd on the mountain's brow,
Who heard the notes arise so faint and low,
Might deem in such a place, that holy hymn
Was raised and chanted by the seraphim!

They went to battle—not as armies go,
Who blindly smite an unoffending foe;
Forth to a glorious field they march'd unaw'd,
The chosen champions of the living God:
They fought and triumph'd, as the good and just,
Who fight in such a cause, for ever must.
We are their children! Have we then no pride
To rise and combat on our fathers' side?
Are we not sworn unto the sacred fight,
To crush the guilty, and defend the right?
The very blood that runs within our veins
Throbs at the name of prison, or of chains:
The cup of liberty is not so small
That we can drain it—it was fill'd for all.
Britain, arise! O, yet while it is time,
In such a cause delay is worse than crime:

Speak! that the tyrant's soul may shrink with fear;
Speak! with a voice, that all the world may hear;
Thy wrath as with a herald's trump proclaim;
For where is he who quails not at thy name?
O sleep not, wait not, do not tarry long—
Be just, be brave, be good as thou art strong;
Come, thou fair Queen; for, as the traveller eyes
The first grey streaks upon the eastern skies,
So earth has fix'd her anxious gaze on thee:
Come forth—come forth—thou idol of the free!

Warrior of Justice! Freedom's noblest son,
Bright is the wreath of glory thou hast won,
Thou patriot, worthy of the olden time—
Thou friend of right—thou enemy of crime!

Great Czartoryski, thy transcendent name
Is the last enter'd in the roll of fame:
Weep not because thou couldst not burst the chain,
For often truth has drawn her sword in vain.
More than his blood the Spartan could not give,
And Cato died when justice ceased to live—
Yet do not weep, for thou hast gain'd a meed,
And won a laurel fresh and bright indeed.
Thou more than king! when ages yet unborn
Shall brand the tyrant with the stamp of scorn,
Those deeds of thine shall win thee more renown,
Than clings around the best and greatest crown;
Fathers shall bid their children think of thee,
And learn to worship truth and liberty;
Thou shalt be sung in many a poet's lay,
As the best champion of our modern day;

Pilgrims shall come from farthest shores of earth
To see the glorious land that gave thee birth;
A deeper homage than at Mecca's shrine
Is paid unto the Prophet, shall be thine.
Loved in thy life, and honoured in thy grave—
Such are the glories that await the brave!

Fear not, poor country! nothing is so great
But hath some foe in those of worse estate;
What is so bright that looks not faint and pale,
When seen through Jealousy's distorted veil?
The sun himself is dim, when darkness strips
Half of his lustre in the slow eclipse;
Yet, even as that shadow moves away,
And unjust night gives place to glorious day,

So shall that gloom of terror and despair
Melt from thy brow, like vapour into air;
Pure and unblemish'd as a virgin bride,
Shalt thou go forth in beauty's conscious pride;
Worship'd as one of renovated birth,
The last and fairest wonder of the earth,
In whom, as in a Goddess, we behold
All that the poets feign'd and dreamt of old.
Bring forth the crown, the robe, and royal gem
Kneel down, and bend the knee to offer them
Let none, except the guilty voice, be dumb,
Shout! for the times of happiness have come;
The gloom is gone, the night hath pass'd away,
We hail the dawning of a glorious day.
Hope, the bright bird that sings as soon as born,
Hath pour'd his lay to greet the rising morn;

And Peace, the holiest of created things,
Is there, with balm and healing on his wings!
Ye, who have seen her in the trial hour,
When fear, and pain, and grief had triple power;
Ye, who have heard her sobs of sore distress,
And breath'd a blessing when none else would bless;
You are the chosen of her festal throng,
Come forth, and join her triumph and her song;
She seeks the blessed shrine where freemen bow,
To offer up her thanks, and pledge a vow:
Thanks for the spirit that has leapt abroad,
And roused the just to fight the war of God!
Thanks, for the holy arm no more delay'd,
Now lifted up to make the proud dismay'd;
A vow of sacred and undying birth,
Against the banded tyrants of the earth,

Which in her heart of hearts shall still remain,
Till man is cleansed from every blot and stain!
He who would live, come over to her side,
Before that vow is sworn and ratified;
By her a holy war, a just crusade,
To strike the powers of darkness, shall be made;
The sword which fathers to their sons bequeath,
Again for freedom shall forsake its sheath,
Knit to the hand, that never raised before
Its gleaming blade with such resistless power;
There will be beacons glaring through the night—
There will be warriors arming for the fight—
There will be gathering from the glade and glen,
Unto the camp of brave and righteous men;
They will march out, a pure and purging flame,
To free the world from bondage, sin, and shame:

They will be conquerors, for who shall stay
To meet with Vengeance in its stern array?
Then shall we know the times that bards of old,
And gifted prophets in their lays foretold;
Peace shall descend from Heaven, and banish'd love
Shall haunt again the mountain and the grove;
Again at shut of eve, and dawn of morn,
The low sweet notes of blessing shall be borne,
Like rich and fuming incense shall they rise,
Earth's grateful tribute to the smiling skies:
The serpent, Hate, shall find some cavern deep,
And coil itself to everlasting sleep:
And Fear shall die, and Death itself grow mild,
And seek the aged as it seeks the child,
Its terrors sooth'd, its anguish lost and gone,
Itself a passport to a blessed throne!

O come, my brothers! at her glorious sign
We go to kneel and worship at the shrine—
We go to pledge the oath with heart and hand,
As listed champions in that chosen band—
We go to war with enemies that lie
Betwixt our life and immortality!
The sun is climbing proudly up the skies,
O hasten, hasten, ye are slow to rise!
Lo! they are standing at the temple gate;
For us alone the bridal train doth wait;
Too long already hath their tarrying been,—
Fling wide the portal to the peerless Queen!

HOMER.

HOMER.

I.

FAR in the glass of the Ægean sea
There lies a lonely and sequester'd isle,
Where Innocence was queen—fair queen! whom we
Desire to seek, but cannot; impious guile
Was there unknown. The gentle and the free
Gazed on each other with unclouded smile,
And Beauty, with a hand of melting power,
Tended that garden like a faery bower.

II.

A cottage stood within a shelter'd nook,
Where a clear stream ran past with joyous song
Into the bay. Two aged poplars shook
Above the roof their branches leaved and long;
The goats went pilfering flowers beside the brook,
Or wander'd up the scented shrubs among
That clothed a neighbouring hill; the bee flew fast
To gather nectar for his sweet repast.

III.

An aged shepherd dwelt within that hut,
The patriarch of his primitive domain,
Who many a year had watch'd the morning put
Its glowing belt across the azure main,
And seen the glooming gates of evening shut
When the high lands were swathed with drizzling rain;
There was he born—there had he lived alone
With two young orphans of a perish'd son.

IV.

They were dear children; one with eyes as blue
As the rich vault of heaven, and sunny hair,
Whose heart had caught the gay and joyous hue
Of that glad climate and bewitching air;
The hours as swift as moments past him flew,
Sweet moments—when the spirit knows no care!
He seem'd from every thing some joy to quaff,
And show'd his lightness by a gleesome laugh

V.

The other was a child of darker mood,
Yet of a temper mild as it was brave;
Often beside the rocky cliffs he stood,
And gazed for hours upon the breaking wave,
And then a quick and hectic flush of blood
Unto his cheek a richer colour gave;
He seem'd to commune with the sea and sky,
And think, or dream of immortality!

VI.

There would he wait until the patient night
Came, and the stars were out and glittering;
Some distant from their fellows, pale and white,
Some wheeling in a clear and joyous ring,
And draw from them the visions infinite
Which Nature's glories to a poet bring,
When Silence, like an old mysterious priest,
Unites the earth and sky in holy rest.

VII.

He cared not for the airy lays that moved
His brother's heart to gladness, as the swain
Sung on some holiday; but when he proved
The wild enchantment of Amphion's strain,
Or told how Orpheus for his well-beloved,
Unto the Thracian mountains did complain,
He sat and listened all in silent tears,
Mixing most strangely with their hopes and fears.

VIII.

And then his heart beat ardently, he felt
The charmed power deep sown in poets' lays;
He caught the spell that passion hath to melt
The spirit in its many trancing ways;
And like a new-won proselyte he knelt,
And worship'd beauty in his childish phrase;
And pray'd, and waited for a single glance
Caught from the splendour of her countenance.

IX.

And on the winter nights, when by the fire
That aged man told wondrous histories
Of wars, and ancient kings who did conspire
To sack old Thebes, that child between his knees
Gazed on the wither'd features of his sire,
Intent with eager wistfulness to seize
The import of each word, the whilst the other
Laugh'd at the earnest posture of his brother.

X.

So grew they up, and time did not estrange
Their feelings with its cold and noiseless art;
One only hoped through life ungall'd to range,
And meet its fortunes with a merry heart;
The other, too, had felt no turn or change,
He knew he must fulfil a nobler part;
He dared not check the torrent of his mind,
He dared not die and leave no name behind.

XI.

Yet were there many found with eyes so blear'd
By gazing on the earth for ugly gold,
Till every thing like worthless toys appear'd,
That in their market was not bought and sold,
Who came to him, and whisper'd what they fear'd,
Then show'd their tale of profits thrice retold,
And urged him to their mean and narrow ways,—
Fools! what is wealth to him who covets praise?

XII.

Fools! you are nothing even to your earth;
What have you done for honour or for her?
What have you done, but made a dreary dearth
Of love and beauty in her character?
My curse be on his head, who first gave birth
Unto such fantasies as now deter
The good, the great, the gifted, and the just,
From rising over low and sordid dust!

XIII.

You have your riches, and you ask no more!
Dare not to pity him who scorns your aim;
Live on and smile, and add unto your store,
Ye noble victors in a noble game!
Heap up your riches on your garner floor,
But do not speak to him who seeks for fame;
For he is pledged unto another oath,
And there is nothing common to you both.

XIV.

He heard them not, or heard them but with scorn.
He fled unto the forest, all alone;
There, couchant 'midst the flowers and grass unshorn,
He framed that lay of rare and wondrous tone,
Which even now upon our lips is borne,
Which men of every tongue have made their own;
That lay which true and tearful passion hath,
That lay which tells of dire Achilles' wrath.

XV.

It grew upon his fancy day by day,
As love upon a fervid spirit grows;
Even when he slept, the music rang alway,
And conjured pictures to his blank repose.
The darkness was an echo of the day,
Wherein some dream new visions did disclose;
He woke in kindled hope, and strove to write
In words the speechless magic of the night.

XVI.

It was to him a bright and holy thing,
His own creation ever in his eyes;
A spell that from its deep and secret spring
Called up his strange and wondrous energies.
The heavens alone behold him sit and sing
How Ajax combats, and how Hector dies!
And every chant by love or passion rung,
Seems like a murmur from a Dryad's tongue.

XVII.

The heavens beheld him, and the earth was still.
There was no calling voice or whisper'd word
Murmured, save where, far up the wooded hill,
Trilled the low twitter of some plaining bird,
Or where within the vale, the screened rill
Spoke out, at times by swooning fits unheard;
Untrod by foot, unknown by other face,
Was this most beautiful and lonely place.

XVIII.

And even as a limner's easy hand
Portrays upon the white and formless page,
A haunted scene within some faery land,
Or youthful form that never smiled at age;
So did his rich and strong creations stand
Thought-raised, and mingled on that silent stage,
Until the very wilderness had life,
And seem'd to blaze with arms, and ring with strife.

XIX

At length his task was ended and complete,
But then he felt as if a friend were gone:
The very labour was a thing more sweet
Than reaping of the harvest he had sown;
And 'twas a work of pity to unseat
The queen, fair Fancy, from her royal throne,—
To turn his eyes from her enchanting look,
And fix them on life's dull and vulgar book

XX.

Again he went unto his old abode,
But felt like one who leaves a pleasant dream
Of wandering through some region all untrod
By mortal step, or floating down a stream
Elysian, underneath the shadows broad
Of ancient trees, that screen the sultry beam
From off his boat, and waking up to pain,
Would fain return unto his sleep again!

XXI.

O, 'twere a pleasant thing to rear a bower
Within the mazes of the human heart,
To be a shelter from the chilling shower
Rain'd upon nature by the storm of art;
Where grief might have no entrance, sin no power,
Where memory might find refuge from the smart
Of all the many wounds that man has known,
Since first he wedded sorrow as his own!

XXII.

It were a pleasant thing to live and die
In company with such sweet solitude,
To bar the door on sad reality,
And shun the world with its intrusive brood;
Alas! we cannot 'scape its piercing eye,
It is a foe that ever will intrude;
For we are bound unto its constant sway,
So let us even face it as we may.

XXIII.

He bow'd unto the whisper of his soul
That urged him not to rest or tarry there,
For such a mind as his, the hard control
Was all too narrow of that island air;
Fame is too proud to see or mark a goal
Within the boundary of an atmosphere;
And he who enters on the lists of pride,
Must fling his scruples and their ties aside.

XXIV.

Then did he visit each familiar place
Which as a child and as a boy he knew,
He went to gaze on each remember'd face,
To hear each voice, the tender and the true,
To fold within a last and sad embrace
Those that he loved so deeply; and there grew
Upon his heart a sick and bursting weight,
The very grief of parting was so great.

XXV.

At length he cross'd the broad and prison sea—
He was a stranger in a foreign land;
He had no friend to ask for sympathy,
No brother with a fond and helping hand;
As nameless as some wondrous Indian tree
Cast by the waters on a northern strand,
He stood amidst the cold and busy crowd,
Then lifted up his voice, and sang aloud.

XXVI.

He sang how Paris left his native Troy,
To win fair Helen from her absent lord,
And how she fled with that deceitful boy,
Lured by his winning form and melting word;
How monarchs swore to work him dire annoy,
And half the world girt on the vengeful sword;
How Agamemnon led the Grecian powers,
And pour'd their battle round the Phrygian towers.

XXVII.

He told how from the star-inwoven realm
The gods descended to the earthly fray,
How Mars put on his adamantine helm
To head the Trojans in their stern array;
How dark Minerva strove to overwhelm
His boiling pride; how darkness conquer'd day,
When Jove arose in all his kingly wrath,
And drove his thunder to its scorching path!

XXVIII.

Then fiercer grew the spirit on his tongue,
When red Sarpedon urged his furious car;
The lances splinter'd, and the corslets rung,
As Ajax crush'd into the bristling war!
Above whose din the shout of terror sprung,
When Hector's spear shot, like a falling star
That hath a power to slay, but not to wound,
And dashed Patroclus on the gory ground.

XXIX.

Forth rush'd Achilles in his quenchless rage,
With heart as ardent as a forger's flame!
And Troy gave back, for no one durst engage
Or cope with him who ever overcame;
Even as a lion leaps from out his cage,
When men have deem'd his tameless spirit tame,
And gluts his vengeance in unmeasured blood,
So legions shudder'd when he rush'd abroad.

XXX.

In vain they fled, they stood and fought in vain,
For death had cast a charm upon his spear;
Some foot by foot went back, and turn'd again,
Some sternly died, some shriek'd, but none might hear.
The warders look'd upon the shifting plain,
And trembled when they saw the foe so near;
And even at the gates, the fugitive
Look'd round and wonder'd how he chanced to live!

XXXI.

Alone the princely captain shunn'd the wall,
To meet this victor of all human kind;
In vain he heard his wife, his parents call—
He could not leave so lost a field behind.
They saw them meet, they saw their champion fall—
They shriek'd, and wept, and wish'd that they were blind!
They saw the thongs thrust through his pierced heels,
And bought his body from the chariot wheels.

XXXII.

Then ceased the strain. As when a solemn tone
Hath fallen from some ancient oracle,
Men stand and listen, though the voice is gone,
As if they thought once more to catch the spell;
So when the passion of that tale was done,
No word, no whisper from the hearers fell;
They stood in wonder for a little space,
Then read their feelings on each other's face.

XXXIII.

They gave him all he sought: around his head
They placed the Delphic laurel's sacred wreath.
O never shall a leaf from thence be shed,
While bards have honour, or whilst man has breath!
There power and glory were together wed,
To live the second life that knows no death;
There shall they be, till earth has past away,
Till darkness wins dominion from the day.

XXXIV.

Even as the beacon fires glare fast along,
When armies land upon a hostile shore;
So throughout Greece the passion of his song
Was hurried, and men's wonder grew the more:
Round every wandering minstrel did they throng,
To bid him sing that story o'er and o'er;
And caught again a sparkle of the fires
That blazed within the bosoms of their sires.

XXXV.

And those of other lands were thrill'd with joy
And wonder at the magic songs he gave.
Within the lone and silent plain of Troy,
Where swift Scamander leaps through Helle's wave,
His lays were chanted by the shepherd boy,
Who drove his flock from many a hero's grave,
And tore the plants of harsh and rank perfume
That grew and blossom'd on Achilles' tomb.

XXXVI.

And if a poet had no higher meed
Than this, it were enough; enough, to make
A name forgotten as a trampled weed,
Bloom into memory even for his sake;
To clothe the earth with his exalted creed;
To see the spirit of the nations shake,
At the bare word that leaves his kindled lips,
As the rude savage gazes at the ships!

XXXVII.

What tells of Priam save the ancient strain?
Speaks not Orestes from the Grecian stage?
Ilion had blazed, and Dido bled in vain,
But that the story lives in Virgil's page:
Touched by a single note, they now remain
Above the wrecks of many a faded age,
Like columns in a desert, bare and wide;
And this is fame! now what is earthly pride?

XXXVIII.

O happy days! when there were none to mar
The gush of feeling in its sunny morn;
When no invidious lips waged rancorous war,
Or struck down genius with the blow of scorn;
On every forehead now some graven scar,
Cut in by secret jealousy, is borne;
No heart can open but 'tis chill'd or crost,
As buds are smitten by the nightly frost.

XXXIX.

Why is a poet now so poor a thing,
That every common hand may hunt him down?
Why must his fancies perish in their spring,
Why must he bend to each ignoble frown?
Is it that we have lost the eagle wing,
And dare not venture for the laurel crown,
That hangs too high for every bard to reach,
And is not to be won by vulgar speech?

XL.

Or is it, that because the world is old,
The hearts of men are waxing older too;
So that each lay, however sweetly told,
Dies in its birth, because it is not new?
Why then to them the very sun is cold,
And the mere sky has lost its glorious hue—
Ay, and their dull philosophy can see
No wonder in the strangest mystery!

XLI.

In the dark oven of their minds they parch
All nature's brilliant colours into one;
They marvel nothing at the seasons' march,
They speak not of the rise or set of sun;
They can dissolve the rainbow's glorious arch,
They count the stars within their garrison;
They drag to day the secrets of the tomb,
And call it light where it is deepest gloom!

XLII.

But we shall not despair; yet, even yet,
The light of song is lingering on our sky;
And there are planets when the sun is set,
And after them comes morning fresh and free:
Some daring spirits on the shore have met,
To launch their bark upon the rolling sea.
And there are golden islands far away,
That bask and gladden in eternal day.

XLIII.

Ungathered blow the lilies by the foot
Of old Parnassus, in the meadows green;
The answer of its echoes is not mute,
And there are waters still in Hippocrene;
And we shall hear once more the modern lute
Bring its enchantment to the ancient scene,
And utter music to the hills again,
With the wild plainings of a lonely strain.

XLIV.

Why flags my tale? Alas, 'tis hard to turn,
And chronicle again the faded past!
To see alone the starry lights that burn
Within the old empyrean, and to cast
Vain looks upon the future; in their urn
Sleep things that shall be seen and sung at last,
When we have past away, and children then
Shall read of us, as we of ancient men.

XLV.

Life is too short:—the child becomes a man,
Before he knows how happy childhood is;
We hurry swiftly thro' our little span,
Our sorrows soon forgot, our cup of bliss
Almost untasted. Hope, that ever ran
Before us, sinks at last, and then we miss
The moments that have faded long ago,
And weep that ought should have deceived us.

XLVI.

O ! few are they who know this ancient truth,
And live like misers hoarding up their time;
Age has its gewgaws, and fantastic youth
Seeks for a memory in feeble rhyme,
Gathering some golden ears of fame, as Ruth
Gleaned her scant harvest in the autumn prime,
That live perhaps to show the world alone
How immortality has lost a son !

XLVII.

Time had not marr'd the beauty of the isle,
But left its aspect ever fair and new;
Still bloomed the shrubs upon the wooded hill,
Beside the cottage still the poplars grew;
And, even as before, the leaping rill
Went murmuring by, and nature kept its hue
So well, that human eye could hardly trace
The hand of time upon its smiling face.

XLVIII.

An aged man sat in the evening mild,
And watch'd some young Icarian infants fling
Flowers on each other in their play; he smiled
Like dying winter on the buds of spring.
They were the children of his youngest child,
Yet to his eye that sight a tear did bring;
Perchance he thought upon the bygone day
When he was mirthful and as young as they.

XLIX.

Athwart the bright and quivering path of gold,
Paved from the setting sun unto the shore,
Landward there moved a boat, with sail unroll'd,
And flapping by the mast; when the broad oar
Struck on the beach, a feeble man and old
Stepp'd slowly down upon the shell-strewn floor,
And a fair boy descending took his hand,
And led his footsteps up the sloping strand.

L.

Blind seem'd the stranger, and around his brows
The snow-white hair waved thin as winds went by;
The burden almost of a century's woes
Had bowed his head, and marred his majesty.
They near'd the cottage, and the shepherd rose
And looked upon him with a pitying eye,
Scanning his faded form, then with a low
And gentle voice asked, "Stranger, who art thou?"

LI.

"Then am I quite forgot!" with feeble cry
The stranger answered, "Then I am forgot!
That voice was speaking to my memory,
And now I hear it!"—Still he answered not.
"O take me by the hand before I die!
Methinks we parted on this very spot,
And I have come to ask a little room
Within my native island for my tomb.

LII.

" O misery! I cannot see thy face,
And thou like me art old, and haply blind;
I am thy brother!" with a piteous gaze
The old man look'd, as if he thought to find
In those worn features some remember'd trace,
Then fell upon his neck—" Within my mind
There is an image, yet I scarce can see
Wherein that image doth resemble thee!

LIII.

" O! tis a long, long time since we have met,
And thou, my brother, thou art changed indeed;
Thy face is as a stranger's face, and yet
My heart is shaking in me like a reed!
It asks me how I ever could forget
A voice like thine; alas! I feel it bleed
With a strange double wound of love and pain,
To see thee thus, yet see thee once again!

LIV.

"Thou speakest not!"—He raised his head; there hung
Upon his lips a smile, as o'er a grave
Hangs one deserted blossom; on his tongue
Some accents falter'd, but they died, and gave
No utterance, his heart was all unstrung—
His mind was wandering darkly in its cave.
They led him from the damp and chilly air,
They brought him to the hut, and placed him there.

LV.

They took a lute and touch'd it to his ear,
They sang an ancient, now forgotten, lay,
To rouse him from his trance. A single tear,
Forced by the memory of another day,
Stole down his cheek; the aged man drew near,
And whisper'd, but the whisper pass'd away
Unnoticed and unheard—he spoke again,
And took one hand—it fell—'twas all in vain!

LVI.

The string was snapt across, the harp had shed
Unto the wandering winds its latest tone;
The lamp was broken, and the light was dead,
The fuel of his life was spent and gone;
Unto the heaven of heavens the soul had fled,
And left the mansion empty and alone!
They laid him underneath the poplar trees,
When the lone moonbeam slept upon the seas.

LVII.

There in a humble grave he lies unknown,
Pass'd daily over by the shepherd's tread.
The wild-flowers wave around; one simple stone,
Long since moss-buried, is above his head!
And many a little mound through Greece is shown
Where legends fable that his dust is laid.—
What doth it matter where the casket lies,
When the great jewel sparkles in our eyes?

LVIII.

There is a moral in my tale—Behold!
The children and the men, they were the same:
One was a beggar, poor, and blind, and old,
A wretched wanderer—HOMER was his name!
Ask you the other's? More than I have told
Lives not his memory on the lips of fame.
Ye to whom life, and youth, and hope are new,
Come near and pause,—which choose you of the two?

POEMS.

A LAMENT

FOR

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY.

Is there no fading of thy central fire,
Spirit of Nature! when thou hear'st the string
That from thy chosen and harmonious lyre
Was wont the utmost melody to wring,
Snap, with the load of its own murmuring?
Hast thou no desolate anthem, that may make
Response to such a lost and broken thing?
Hast thou no echoes, faint and scarce awake?
No music meet for him who died for music's sake?

Go, call the winds from the tempestuous north—
Scourge up the rugged ocean from his sleep,
And bid their fearful choristry fling forth
The thunder-organ'd chant across the deep;
To mourn for him, for whom I fain would weep,
Were not mine eyes weak traitors to my brain,
That throbs bewildered by a weary heap
Of dull unfledged thoughts of common strain,
That drive my tears away, and vex me into pain!

Unprison'd tempest, and thou, unknown cry
Of ocean in his wrath, which none may hear
Abroad within the ships and live! pent sigh,
Which the great earth doth utter, when her ear
Shrinks from some nameless whisper, like a spear
Startling her entrails! ye were heard aloud,
Pouring your accents o'er the poet's bier,
When the great billows whiten'd like a cloud
Around the lifeless corpse, and swathed it in their shroud!

Upon a bare and desolated shore,
Where the tired waters jangle with the shells,
The ocean flung the wasted form it bore
Amongst its ridged lines and tufted swells;
There was he found. No toll of churchyard bells
Rings for his burial; no mourners keep
Watch o'er his coffin, till the iron nails
Rivet him down—they laid him on a heap,
Like an old Roman chief who sleeps his wakeless sleep!

It was a hot and slumbrous summer-noon,
The sun was glaring like a pestilence
Up in the sky, and over the lagoon
No shadow fell. The kindled pile, from whence
The smoke oozed out in breathings dark and dense,
Threw a short shadow on the sand. Spellbound
Was nature, and the quietude intense
Broken but by the short and crackling sound,
And one lone seabird's scream, that flew in circles round.

The master of the lyre stood near, his eye
Wander'd, as when some doomed man doth read
A prophet's warnings of calamity.
And one was there, who leant his throbbing head
Against a tree; his very heart did bleed
Within him like a brother's.—Weep anew!
God shield thy spirit in its hour of need,
Thou persecuted man! for it is true,
And just, and good, though some would pierce it
through and through.

They scatter'd water from the silent sea,
When that strange sacrifice had ceased to burn;
And with slow hands they gather'd patiently
The ashes in a white and sculptured urn:
To no unholy charnel was it borne,
Nor laid beneath the aisle of sacred dome—
No! where the clouds might weep and breezes mourn,
They dug midst ancient dust his narrow home,
Where men of old were laid beneath the walls of Rome.

There, with the poets of another age,
He sleeps the dreary night that hath no day.
O! it were worth a long, long pilgrimage
To kneel beside his tomb—to kneel and pray,
Where prayer were passion!—Hath not sick decay
Pass'd from him as from some embalmed saint?—
Rouse thee, my heart, and thou shalt hence away,
Freed from this dull and wearying constraint,
And stand beside the shrine, so free from earthly taint.

Lo! from the Aventine, the charmed moon
Shines through the columns rear'd into the night,
And the low winds in their autumnal tune
Waft the thin clouds, fringed with a watery white,
Across her disk, obscuring half from sight
The sleep-hush'd city. All beneath is dark,
Save where a shifting and uncertain light,
Far down upon the Tiber, serves to mark
The slow and heedful course of some belated bark.

I stand without the old Romulean wall
Amongst the tombs, and here my task is done;
For, by the straggling gleams of light that fall
Close by my feet, upon a carven stone,
I read the epitaph, "HERE LIETH ONE
WHOSE NAME WAS WRIT IN WATER." Child of fame!
Thou who didst perish ere thy prize was won,
False are those words—thy unforgotten name
Is blotless, deathless now; 'tis writ in words of flame!

Do thou forgive me, that my feeble tongue,
O Adonais! hath no other stave
Tuned to thy memory, for thou wert sung
By him, whose word is a proud charm to save
From Lethe's waters.—Lo! upon thy grave
The shadow of his stone streams deep athwart;
Even as his spirit strove to shield and save
Thy relics from the sharp and bitter dart,
That fell like withering ice upon thy noble heart!

* Keats, Shelley, and his infant child, are buried side by side.

Above his ashes the light-feather'd grass
Bends its tall head before the moaning wind
That whispers by, as if the voice did pass
Of some invisible and spirit mind;
As when the sweet and lovelorn Syrinx pined
Into the earth, the conscious reeds above
Sigh'd with a music of no common kind;
For the sick soul was ever near, and wove
The sounds in thrilling notes, and every note was love!

There is a little hillock close beside,
O'ergrown with scented weeds and blossoms wild;
For here the gentle Earth dared not divide
The stem and branch, the father and the child!
Is not the tomb a chamber calm and mild,
When sanctified by kindred sleep like this?—
When love lies buried, and so undefiled,
Is death not slumber, is not slumber bliss,
A mirror of bright things where nought unholy is?

78366

Ah! as the scented grass is fed with dew
When morning enters on his glowing quest,
As the sea-wearied mariner doth view
His own loved shores throned in the golden west;
So are such thoughts sweet visions of calm rest,
To those who voyage on this dangerous stream
Of life, where meditation is at best
The faint cold solace of a fainting gleam,
And when joy seems to smile, alas, it doth but seem!

Away unto thy task, my heart, away!
Such words the coldly wise will laugh to scorn—
Is thy dream past or broken? Lo! the day
Across the purple mountain tops is borne;
The silver mists are fading in the morn,
The twitter of the birds is waking near
Within the bosom of the scented thorn,
And the wide river's coils are glancing clear—
Away, my heart, away—why dost thou linger here?

O weary life! O unaccomplished joy!
Where ev'n despair is faint, and meek, and mild—
An early haunting care is with the boy,
That never dull'd the forehead of the child;
We journey on, till twenty years have piled
Within the brain a heap of maxims sage,
Then comes the struggle, selfish, stern, and wild;
Gold is the only God, till heavy age
Bows its hoar head to death—so ends our pilgrimage!—

The name is buried too, unless it live
Link'd to the breathings of a godlike heart;
Fame is the sole elixir, that can give
Life and eternity! It is the part,
Poet, that thou didst choose; within the mart
Of this wide world that precious merchandise
Is rarely sought or found.—Thou didst not start,
Though malice, and the glare of envious eyes,
And swords of poison, are the meed of him who buys.

No monument was rear'd on Pompey's shrine,
For shrine it surely is where heroes lie—
Even so the tombstone that is rear'd on thine
Is scarce a motto to thy memory;
Dust will to dust, yet some things may not die;
The songs of Grecian and of Roman time,
And thine, and more have pinions, and will fly
Like eagles in their proud and glorious prime,
Seen in their place of pride, yet far from earth and crime.

Thine eye was like thy heart—thou could'st not view
The burdens under which we struggle on,
And not lament; men blindly come and strew
Thorns for our naked feet, and for their own;
The earth sends up a universal groan
Beneath its own oppression;—thou wert made
For those bright ages that have long since gone,
When love was virtue, virtue had no shade—
Alas! that man's faint heart hath let those ages fade!

Thou wert a comet men beheld and wonder'd,
Yet fear'd withal—thy very word was power;
Thou spak'st of thunder, and, behold, it thunder'd!
Thou spak'st of beauty, and a blushing shower,
Like Danaë's gold within the brazen tower,
Rain'd on our open hearts, until we felt,
Beyond restraint, the spirit of the hour
Moving around us, like the magic belt
Wove by the Siren's song, that all it touch'd could melt.

Whence came the river of ethereal light,
The Pthlegethon of song, that from thy page
Hath leapt, and lighted up the vale of night
With clearer rays than ever ancient sage
Wrung from his heart? Thou untaught Archimage—
Who hast decipher'd with the glance of youth
The secret wisdom-tablets of all age—
Where didst thou gain such wond'rous power? In sooth,
Leander was thy name, thy Hero's name was Truth!

She was the mark that led thee through the deep,
To combat with the rude and boisterous waves,
Most like the torch upon the Sestos steep
Flicker'd afar her light. Ah, we are slaves
That may not burst our chain! The yawning graves
Are open for us, and we cannot find
That which we seek; doubts rise, and passion raves
Around our heads, before us and behind,
And then our guiding flame is scatter'd by the wind.

O, ye faint echoes of a still-born sigh!
O, loosen'd murmurs of an early string!
O, thou most sad, most dull monotony
Of untimed song, that from the spirit's spring
Chimes in such drowsy fall, alongst a ring
Of unshorn margin-thoughts! what envious thrall
Checks your concordance with his heavy wing?
Why are ye thus so thrilless—one and all—
So slumbrous in your rise, so falter'd in your fall?

It is because the rapid inward river
Hath other utterance than in tears and words,—
Because the spirit breeze will pant and quiver
With thoughts that dare not stir the Æolian chords,—
Because the unspeaking soul hath other lords,
And other masters than thought-wrestling lips,—
Because the tongue no other aid affords
Than the sea-murmurs to the calmed ships,
Or earth's distracted sigh unto the charm'd eclipse!

Come, then, ye weary children of my brain,
And back unto your silent home return;
There keep your patient watch in tranced pain
Around the image of the poet's urn;
Gaze on his light that evermore doth spurn
The darkness from its halo, gaze your fill;
A fire like his, when lighted up, shall burn
Still unextinguish'd, and triumphant still,
A startling beacon-blaze upon a lonely hill!

But you, alas! what hope have you of fame?
What portion in the heritage of song?
What place of pride, when he, whose honour'd name
Peals like a chord Orphean—whose rich tongue
In the dry fountain of our souls hath sprung
The pleasant rain of silver chiming tears;
When words like his have fall'n amidst the throng,
And brought no wonder to their listless ears,
No passion save to those who made them themes for years?

Yea, let them live! if life it be to wage
A restless grasping war for gain and gold;
Small wisdom dwells there with the craft of age,
Youth in its golden prime is bought and sold,
And ere the hairs are grey, the heart is old.
Ye, over whom the Roman laurels wave,
Your names are graved in hearts of other mould,
Your fame hath gone beyond your glorious grave—
It is where it should be—beside the good and brave!

ODE TO THE PAST.

I.

SURELY our path is darker than before,
And we have little power to make new light,
There is a change upon this earthly shore :
Some growing stain, some dark and blasting blight
Has gather'd round our heads; for, when we look
Upon the past, there is an atmosphere,
Far richer, milder, happier, and more clear
Than ours is now—How is it that we brook
This drear enchantment? Can it be that right
Is banish'd from the world, and sin and crime
Are now the ministers of hoary time?

II.

To grieve is to be wise—and yet we grieve,
And yet our wisdom cometh slowly on;
And yet we hope—how vainly!—to retrieve
That love, and light, and splendour that is gone.—
How can we? when our every thought is fixt
On objects which the wise of old despised;
Glory is dead, and sordidness is prized,
And even truth with lies is strangely mixt:
Now may we seek for love with piteous moan,
For love within the world existeth not,
And hope is sad, and fancy is forgot.

III.

Our days are surely not the days of joy—
There are within this theatre of pain
Too many scenes of sadness and annoy
To cloud the forehead, and distract the brain;—

There are too many tasks the soul should spurn,
That it must bend to with disguised smile,
Mocking at happiness; and see the while
Its dearest visions buried in their urn,
And all their glorious promise reared in vain!
Doth it not anguish till despair is meek,
And even pride is wearied, worn, and weak?

IV.

Our sleep is not the sleep of quietness—
For it is haunted by imaginings,
That do excel all present happiness,
As far as fancy doth all human things;
They are the death-raised children of the past,
The spectral forms that whisper to the mind
Dark omen oracles, drear as the wind
Which o'er a lonely moor is forward cast,
When the old year unto its infant sings.

Alas! that time should have a power so dread
To make the living bow unto the dead!

V.

We cannot tell when passion lives or dies,
Truth is so great a stranger to the heart;
Much have we done to purchase miseries,
And now we cannot force them to depart!
We seek for that which we shall never find;
We seek for joy that we have thrown away;
We sit like men who wait the dawn of day
For ever, and forget that they are blind.
O! world, cold world, how retrogade thou art,
When thou hast lost whate'er the soul desires,
And hast no light but heart-consuming fires!

VI.

Earth, mother earth, thou art the same no more!
The future is an ocean of no rest;
The past alone is an enchanted shore,
A solitary island of the blest—
A starry Cyclad, from whose beach our ship
Is ever distant, ever still in sight—
O'er which deep quiet and eternal light
Hang evermore, whilst the uncertain lip
Of time's rough wave is ever at our breast,
And the masts strain, and yield like yearling pines,
Until the heart is faint with fearful signs.

VII.

Thou Golden Age! when love did overshadow
Like a bright cloud the rich and glowing earth,
When on the mountain, field, and grassy meadow,
Creation revell'd in eternal birth—

Why hast thou gone so utterly? why fled
With all thy sweets? Ah sorrow! beauty must;
For man will ever trample in the dust
All chaplets of bright flowers, and in their stead
Comes blight and poison, pestilence and dearth,
And sorrow in its many coiled ways,—
Yea, let him build an altar in their praise!

VIII.

Is there more beauty in the modern page,
Than lives within "the songs of Grecian years?"
Is there more virtue in the modern sage,
To fledge the soul and flatter down its fears?
Have we as passion'd or as pure a love
As stray'd beside the old Arcadian rills?
Are not the forests of the western hills,

The only home of Peace, affrighted dove?

Have we more cause for laughter or for tears?

Is not the light of life waxed dark and dim?

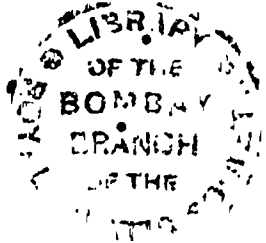
O change the bridal song for funeral hymn

SHADOWS OF RECOLLECTION.

It is no dream! yet haunting visions come,
Most like remembrance, to my troubled mind,
Thoughts that I cannot crush or fling behind,
Of some old grouped trees, and cottage home,
And hills, which in a boyhood I did roam
The livelong summer day: I cannot find
Realities for things like these, which bind
My heart into a strange belief of some
Life before living. Does the spirit sleep,
Since 'tis immortal, until tardy fate
Shuts it within this frail and wayward heap
Of clay? Or, as the wise of old relate,
Are Lethe's waters not too dull or deep,
To quench all memory of a former state?

THE MAUSOLEUM.

A MONUMENT of love! more glorious love
Than ever bloom'd beneath the eternal sun,
Than any which the poets harp upon,
Or old Romance hath into being wove.
It stood far distant from the under grove,
Upon a mountain pinnacle, alone;
Large as the giant piles of Babylon,
Silent as if no living thing did move
Within its halls; the whisper echoes slept,
Subdued to silence by the lordly gloom,
For with a timid air the daylight crept,
And hardly broke into the middle room,
Where a dark-veiled woman sat and wept—
'Twas Artemisia by her husband's tomb!



EDINBURGH:
PRINTED BY BALLANTYNE AND COMPANY,
PAUL'S WORK, CANONGATE.

00078366

Digitized with financial assistance from the
Government of Maharashtra
on 17 February, 2016